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Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

During the period under review, in addition to convening its fourteenth and fifteenth ministerial meetings, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa organized the Subregional Conference on the Question of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa. The Conference was seen as an opportunity for the Central African States to develop a plan of action that would assist them in addressing this problem effectively.

Owing to divergent views between Government representatives and representatives of civil society from States members of the Committee, the Conference was not able to agree on a plan of action. Instead, it made a number of recommendations that could be implemented at the national, subregional and regional levels. At the same time, it drew the attention of the international community to the plight of the victims of the ongoing armed conflicts in Central Africa.

The Committee also organized a meeting of experts in Libreville, from 2 to 5 July 2001, on the modalities and terms of reference of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

* A/56/150.

** This report covers the activities undertaken by the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa from July 2000 to July 2001.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 55/34 B of 20 November 2000, entitled "Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa", the General Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed its support for efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures in order to ease tensions and conflicts and to further peace, stability and sustainable development in Central Africa, and for the programme of work of the Committee.

2. By the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue to lend all their support to the effective establishment of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. Moreover, it requested the Secretary-General to provide the States members of the Committee with the necessary support for the smooth functioning of the early-warning mechanism for Central Africa and the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, created by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and to support the establishment of a network of parliamentarians with a view to the creation of a subregional parliament in Central Africa.

3. The present report is submitted pursuant to the aforementioned requests. It covers the activities undertaken by the United Nations and the Standing Advisory Committee since the submission of the last report of the Secretary-General (A/55/170) on the matter.

II. Action by the United Nations

4. During the reporting period, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which serves as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, continued to work closely with ECCAS States in promoting peace and security in the Central African region. This cooperation was further strengthened through the activities of the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa.

5. The Regional Centre is currently providing assistance to the Governments of Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad with a joint weapons collection project aimed at curbing the flow of illicit weapons at their common borders. The Regional Centre is also providing advisory services to ECCAS States with regard to the creation of national commissions for weapons collection.

III. Meetings of the Standing Advisory Committee

6. During the reporting period, the Committee held the fourteenth and fifteenth ministerial meetings, the Subregional Conference on the Question of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa, and a meeting of experts on the modalities and terms of reference of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

7. The Subregional Conference on the Question of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa, held in Bujumbura from 14 to 16 August 2000 (A/55/506-S/2000/1006), was attended by senior Government and military officials and representatives of civil society from the Committee's member States, as well as by representatives of the donor community. It offered the opportunity for an in-depth, open and direct exchange of views on the extent, implications and consequences of the phenomenon of refugees and displaced persons in Central Africa.

8. The Conference covered the following five themes: (i) causes and consequences of massive displacements of persons in Central Africa; (ii) situation of refugees and displaced persons in Central Africa (magnitude of the phenomenon, difficulties, constraints and the problems of recognition, integration and repatriation; (iii) problems specific to women and children refugees and displaced persons; (iv) legal and institutional framework for the protection of refugees and displaced persons (national, regional and international legislation); and (v) solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons in Central Africa (measures to be undertaken at the national, regional and international levels to improve the situation of refugees and displaced persons).

9. The Conference adopted recommendations outlining measures to be undertaken at the national, subregional and regional levels. Recognizing that women and children constitute the majority of refugees and displaced persons and stressing the need for better protection of women and children in the context of

ongoing wars and conflicts in Central Africa, participants called for the convening of a subregional conference on the protection of women and children in armed conflict and the establishment of special reception centres in various Central African countries with a view to providing medical and psychological care to refugee women and children. The subregional conference on the protection of women and children in armed conflict is scheduled to be held in early November 2001.

10. Both the fourteenth and fifteenth ministerial meetings of the Committee were held in Bujumbura, respectively, on 17 and 18 August 2000 and from 16 to 20 April 2001. At its fourteenth ministerial meeting, the Committee endorsed the recommendations of the Conference. During the course of the meeting, the Committee elected a new bureau consisting of the following: President: Burundi; First Vice-President: Democratic Republic of the Congo; Second Vice-President: Central African Republic; and Rapporteur: Equatorial Guinea. The new bureau will serve until the sixteenth ministerial meeting, which will be held in Kinshasa from 13 to 17 August 2001.

11. At both the fourteenth and fifteenth ministerial meetings, the Committee reviewed the geopolitical and security situation within individual States members of the Committee. It also examined the interstate cooperation on security matters among Central African States and the evaluation of the implementation, by member States, of previous decisions and recommendations of the Committee.

12. On the situation in Angola, the Committee expressed concern about the continuing conflict in Angola, especially the continued attacks by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and their tragic impact on peace, security, stability and development in Angola. The Committee called on all Central African countries to comply strictly with the sanctions imposed on UNITA by the United Nations. It welcomed the positive developments in the situation in Burundi, in particular, the progress made with regard to the Arusha peace process. It urgently appealed to the armed rebels to agree to take part in talks and called on all the Burundi parties to work for national reconciliation and sustainable peace.

13. With regard to Cameroon, the Committee, while expressing concern over the ongoing cross-border phenomenon of armed highway robberies, the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons and the upsurge of organized crime, welcomed the growing climate of peace and stability in that country. As to the situation in the Central African Republic, the Committee welcomed the restoration of peace in the Republic and, in particular, the establishment of participatory democracy as characterized by the inclusion, in the Government, of representatives of various political parties.

14. Regarding the situation in Chad, the Committee welcomed the continuing process of consolidating peace and democracy in that country. It encouraged the Chadian authorities to continue the policy of dialogue and reaching out to the opposition in order to achieve national reconciliation. The Committee welcomed the peace and stability prevailing in both Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

15. Concerning the Congo, the Committee welcomed the effective cessation of hostilities throughout the country and noted with satisfaction the easing of tensions, the normalization of conditions throughout the country, the reopening of the Congo-Ocean railway line and the adoption of an interim post-conflict programme.

16. In the area of interstate cooperation, the Committee particularly welcomed the participation of Gabonese military officers in the activities of the Monitoring Committee for the return of peace in the Congo, the tripartite security cooperation among Angola, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the cooperation between the Central African Republic, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

17. The Standing Advisory Committee also welcomed the decisions adopted at the third meeting of the Committee of Central African Police Chiefs (CCPAC) held in Yaoundé from 12 to 19 June 2000. The Standing Advisory Committee, in particular, commended the setting up in each country of a committee to monitor the activities of CCPAC, the creation of a framework for dialogue and cooperation among Central African directors of judicial police, the holding in November 2000 of national consultations among crime control agencies and efforts to harmonize legislation in the countries of the subregion with a view to combating organized crime.

18. At the meeting of experts on the modalities and terms of reference of the Subregional Centre for

Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, the experts agreed on a draft statute that will be presented to the Council of Ministers during the next summit of heads of State and Government of ECCAS countries, to be held sometime before the end of 2001. The meeting, which was held in Libreville from 2 to 5 July 2001, was attended by all 10 remaining active members of the Committee namely, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe.

IV. Programme of activities for 2001-2002

19. It is expected that the full programme of activities for the 2001-2002 period will be elaborated at the sixteenth ministerial meeting, to be held in Kinshasa from 13 to 17 August 2001.

V. Administrative and financial matters

20. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued to provide funding, from the regular budget, for the two ministerial meetings, while the Subregional Conference on the Question of Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central Africa and the meeting of experts on the modalities and terms of reference of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa were financed from the Trust Fund for the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. The Trust Fund, which relies on voluntary contributions from Member States, governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as private individuals, did not receive any contributions during the reporting period. In this regard, the Secretary-General wishes to appeal to Member States and to the international community as a whole to contribute generously to the Trust Fund so as to facilitate the effective implementation of the programme of work of the Committee.

VI. Conclusions and observations

21. The United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa will continue to play a vital role in promoting peace and security in the Central African region. It will continue to serve as a forum for regular consultations and the exchange of information and suggestions among the States members of ECCAS on confidence-building measures that could enhance peace and security in the region.

22. Since the establishment of the Committee in 1992, the continued support of the General Assembly for the implementation of its activities has led to strengthened cooperation for peace and security between Central African countries. However, much remains to be done if conditions for lasting peace, disarmament and development are to be established. It is imperative that the international community continue to extend its support to promoting and building peace in Central Africa. For his part, the Secretary-General will continue to provide all the assistance he can.